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February 15, 1962
4-4-91FOURTH THOMPSON-GROMYKO MEETING, FEBRUARY 9, 1962

The fourth Thompson-Gromyko meeting February 9, convened at Soviet initiative, appears to have been intended by the Soviets not as a give-and-take negotiating session but as an occasion to underscore the incompatibility of the present US and Soviet stands on Berlin. The document tabled by the Soviet Foreign Minister did not attempt a serious answer to the argumentation of the US papers submitted February 1. Nor did Gromyko venture into any new territory. Indeed, his exposition of the standard Soviet line was even more categorical than before.

Thus the Soviet declaration departed from the normal Soviet contention that a "free city" status for West Berlin would be the "best possible solution", to assert that a free city is "the sole solution which would not cause damage to any of the interested parties." Gromyko underlined Soviet rigidity on the free city proposals with his statement that "the USSR categorically refuses to agree to the maintenance of the existing situation in Germany" and that the "indefinite retention of...troops in West Berlin is quite impossible." And while the Soviet memorandum expressed willingness to "combine interests of unobstructed access" with free city status and respect for GDR sovereignty, it took a more rigid position than before on the question of an international access authority and made no effort to explore the possibilities for some type of agreed arrangement on access. The document stated merely that the "Soviet Government is not in agreement with these proposals" advanced by the US. Finally, the declaration repeated the separate treaty threat (though with no indication of imminent action) and concluded by asserting that "we want peace, but if the Western powers carry matters to war,...we are prepared to stand up for ourselves."

The fact that Gromyko carefully made no attempt to end the talks indicates that this rigid Soviet stance is not designed to produce an impasse in negotiations. Presumably the Soviets have one of two objectives in mind.

First, they may hope to move the West off its present position on a Berlin settlement by assuming a tough stance and calling attention to the possible consequences of a failure to move toward the Soviet position. In particular, they may hope to induce the West to discuss Berlin's status simultaneously with the question of access, or to discuss an "interim" settlement. The Soviets almost certainly regard the proposals tabled by the

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number 11 of 13 copies, Series A.

REVIEWED BY: *Blade* Date: *4/19/91*

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US at the last session as an opening bargaining counter. They may also believe that any indication of a softening of the Soviet position at this time would be premature.

Or, Moscow may have concluded that no agreement on West Berlin is likely to emerge from the present exchanges and, by crystallizing an impasse on this issue, hopes to direct talks to other issues. Noteworthy in this regard were Gromyko's several pointed references to borders. Gromyko asserted that access is too narrow a basis for talks, and that "without introduction of the necessary clarity into the question of German borders... and also into other questions brought up by the Soviet Government, no exchange of opinions can be productive."

Similarly noteworthy may be the statement in the Soviet document that "we consider the presence of foreign troops in any country in general undesirable as this infringes to some extent upon the sovereignty of a given country." The interjection of this idea could presage some Soviet initiative with regard to foreign troops in Europe.

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